



Howard County Council

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COUNCILMEMBERS

Mary Kay Sigaty, Chairperson
District 4
Jennifer Terrasa, Vice Chairperson
District 3
Calvin Ball
District 2
Greg Fox
District 5
Courtney Watson
District 1

Minutes Approved 5/18/09 Budget Work Session May 5, 2009

Chairperson Mary Kay Sigaty called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. on May 5, 2009, in the C. Vernon Gray Room, 8930 Stanford Boulevard, Columbia, MD.

Members Present: Calvin Ball, Greg Fox, Mary Kay Sigaty, Jennifer Terrasa, Courtney Watson

The Council discussed proposed operating budgets with department representatives, as follows. Ray Wacks, Budget Director, participated in the discussion of all budgets.

Circuit Court – The Honorable Diane Leisure

Judge Leisure stated that the budget is 3% lower than last year with savings in areas within the Court's control. Highlights include achievement of State case time standards by implementation of alternate dispute resolution with State funded retired judges; grant funded programs providing procedural guidance to pro se parties; and pro bono programs. The Court receives 7,000 – 8,000 filings, with 40% of the matters in domestic relations, which also see a high percentage of pro se parties. The Court has also instituted settlement conferences for criminal matters, again using retired judges. The budget seeks to reduce the juror fee back to the minimum (\$15 paid by the State), a savings of \$5 to the County. There are reductions in supplies and professional development. The County funded staff is included in the furlough. Grant funded staff has already been furloughed by the State. The outcome for 6 employees potentially impacted by both furloughs will be monitored.

Judge Leisure also presented the layout for Courthouse renovations. There was a lengthy discussion of the impacts of the renovations on The Register of Wills. Kay Hartleb also testified. The Council encouraged a collaborative approach in the resolution of the competing interests.

Judge Leisure was also requested to provide additional information on the usage of community services programs by the Courts.

Orphan's Court

Mr. Wacks indicated that the budget consists of the judges' stipends and expenses mandated by the State.

State's Attorney – Dario Broccolino, Esq.

Mr. Broccolino indicated that there are no new positions with the net increase of .5 FTEs reflecting mid-year changes by personnel action increasing the hours for part-time positions. The staff will be furloughed. There are no promotions. The office anticipates efficiencies related to electronic discovery. Cuts in meetings and memberships will be offset by in-house training. Data processing expenses have increased.

There is no real program providing the same services as the closed alternate sentencing program for juveniles.

Sheriff – James Fitzgerald

There was an extensive discussion of the closing of the alternative sentencing program. Sheriff Fitzgerald indicated that the number of referrals and the available work sites both declined; conversely, there was little control over participation by the referrals and monitoring the work sites consumed staff time. In sum, he disputed the return on the investment. The Council shared correspondence from Neil E. Dorsey. Sheriff Fitzgerald agreed to respond to the letter and to provide additional information concerning the alternative sentencing program in two days.

Sheriff Fitzgerald explained the \$65,000 decrease for vehicles. In brief, vehicles that were previously taken home out of the County are now being driven to and left at County facilities.

Sheriff Fitzgerald also explained the reallocation of positions, a net decrease of 4 FTEs.

Board of Elections – Betty Nordaas

Ms. Nordaas discussed the budgetary impacts of the paper trail and early voting bills. The paper trail system may require an additional \$100,000 in FY2010 while early voting could be as much as \$750,000 to \$775,000 in FY2011. The costs are in addition to costs associated with the existing touch system, which will continue through 2014. Finally, the Board of Elections will likely need to exercise a lease extension pending relocation.

Police – Chief William McMahon

The budget reflects a decrease of about \$1.4 million. Chief McMahon explained staffing changes, including the addition of dispatchers and conversion of sworn officers to civilian positions. Patrols have increased as a result of recently added officers with redeployment for reduced response time, including the Villages of Wilde Lake and Owen Brown. The officers and dispatchers are protected from furloughs. Contingency is reduced by 25%. Chief McMahon discussed the benefits of community policing and bike patrols of pathways. The Council requested a history of overtime and positions update. There was also a discussion of the over-hire (4 positions) for the police academy, reflecting the anticipated dropouts. The line item for speed cameras is a place holder, pending local legislation. Chief McMahon also noted the benefits of the diversion program for first-time, non-violent juvenile offenders. Resources for gang investigations are considered sufficient. Finally, animal control offers volunteer opportunities for youths at least 16 years old.

Corrections – Jack Cavanaugh

Mr. Cavanaugh stated that the budget is a maintenance effort. The jail population has been stable over 5 years, although secure housing is near capacity. Gang activity in the jail has increased. There was a brief discussion of the history of diversion and alternative service

programs. Finally, Council asked Mr. Wacks to provide a 3-year history for administrative charge backs.

Fire and Rescue – Chief William Goddard

Chief Goddard stated that the highlights include a 3% reduction and a contingency carry over. He explained the terms of the negotiated labor contract: although the annual COLA is 6% for the period July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2011, for FY 2010, the COLA has been deferred until January 1, 2010, effectively reducing to 3%. He explained the 24-48 work schedule, including Kelly Day. As compared to other jurisdictions, employment is considered less competitive on entry, but more competitive above the rank of Captain. Chief Goddard also discussed County funding of the voluntary companies. The Department will implement standardization and internal controls with respect to County funding. There was a discussion of new, grant funded positions and the five year impact on County funding. The new positions provide a fourth person in three of the busiest stations in order to meet national staffing requirements. Mr. Wacks will provide additional information on the allocation of overhead. The purpose of the trust agency multifarious fund was described. And finally, the Pathway Program continues to be funded.

Soil Conservation District – Robert Ensor

The \$200,000 reduction reflects a reduction of two positions to be funded by fees, including sediment and erosion control plan review. The fee structure is still under review. The ability to meet the salaries and overhead will be dependent on the level of development activity. Grant funded agricultural activity is a contingent source of revenue. Mr. Wacks stated that the Administration suggested returning the positions to the County budget. Ultimately, the District opted for independence.

Planning and Zoning – Marsha McLaughlin

The budget reflects the elimination of and partial year position funding. The fund balance decrease for Agricultural Preservation has been budgeted as a contingency.

Public Works – Jim Irvin

Mr. Irvin summarized several environmental initiatives. There was a discussion of service reductions, primarily the timeliness of response for lane markings, tree trimming, litter control and pot hole filling. There was also a brief discussion of funding for shared septic systems. Finally, the Department is expanding opportunities for use of reclaimed water.

Inspections/Licenses/Permits – Bob Frances

Sixty-six authorized positions. The Liquor Board position will be transferred to the County Council.

County Council

The Members discussed the funding for TV Services at the Board of Education. The Administration will be asked to clarify cost sharing for Granicus.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:45 p.m.